

## Medical isolation and your emotions: A guide for patients and caregivers

Hospitalizations are a time for healing, but you may notice changes in your medical and emotional well-being when medical isolation precautions are required.

Each person experiences medical isolation in his or her unique way. This information explains common environmental, emotional, and psychological feelings and concerns shared by patients, families, and caregivers during medical isolation.

You may benefit from talking to your health care team about your feelings and needs. The health care team includes social workers, recreation therapists, art therapists, psychiatrists, psychologists, chaplains, infection control nurses, and doctors. They are all available to provide support and recreation, both in and out of your room, to help you cope with isolation.

### Environmental changes

- Isolation precautions may limit your access to common areas on the unit and in the hospital.
- You and your caregivers may feel more fatigued, which can be related to feelings of confinement.

### Emotional changes

As a patient or caregiver, you may experience:

- Boredom, loneliness
- Sleeping more during the day
- Changes in eating habits
- Loss of interest in social or recreational activities
- Worries about the reason for isolation or about having or catching an infection

### Psychological impact

- Depending on the type of isolation, visits from friends and family may be reduced. This can limit the amount of interaction with others and perceived support.
- The precautions taken to guard against infection can require you and those in your immediate environment to wear masks, gowns, and gloves. These precautions may cause some patients to feel a sense of stigma—feeling unclean or unsafe because they have an “infectious disease.”
- Some patients become increasingly reliant upon others to entertain and care for them during the isolation period

**Note:** *These symptoms may become more pronounced during long isolation periods.*

## What to expect and how to cope: Helpful tips

- **Education before and during isolation may reduce some of the stressors you may experience during this period.** If you have questions, talk with your doctors and/or nurses about why you are on isolation and why precautions are necessary. Remember that isolation is critical to keeping you safe and healthy.
- **Having objects of comfort during isolation can help lessen separation and boredom.** You may find comfort from your favorite books and music. It can also be helpful to arrange telephone calls, video chats, or visits with loved ones.
- **Keep several activities on hand.** People often tire of doing the same thing every day, so make sure to have variety of games, movies, books, and/or arts/crafts to help stimulate, distract, and comfort you during this time.
- **Maintain a daily routine as much as possible.** Opening your blinds during the day and closing them at night may help you. Sleeping during the day to cope with boredom will often lead to trouble sleeping at night.
- **Discuss available options for in-room or out-of-room activities with your recreation therapist.**
- **If you have major changes in mood or behavior, such as becoming increasingly sad or irritable, discuss these concerns with your health care team.** If deemed appropriate, a consult may be placed with a mental health professional.

***Note:** Not everyone has negative reactions to isolation precautions. Some appreciate their reduced risk of spreading infection and being infected. Others feel enhanced privacy due to limited visitation, while others enjoy the quiet time for reflection. As with many medical journeys, you and your caregivers may feel better on some days and worse on others.*

## Recreation therapy

Individual sessions with a recreation therapist can be scheduled for you. Tailored to your unique needs, these sessions can help you adjust during your hospital stay. Sessions include opportunities for: creative expression, physical activity, relaxation techniques, and/or other personalized strategies.

Depending on medical approval, sessions may occur in your room or in recreation therapy areas.

The Clinical Center's recreation therapy staff provides education and orientation to our family-centered care programs. These programs support patients, families and their guests.

The NIH Patient Library is also available to provide you with books, magazines, movies and music. You can contact the patient library at 301-451-7603.

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